

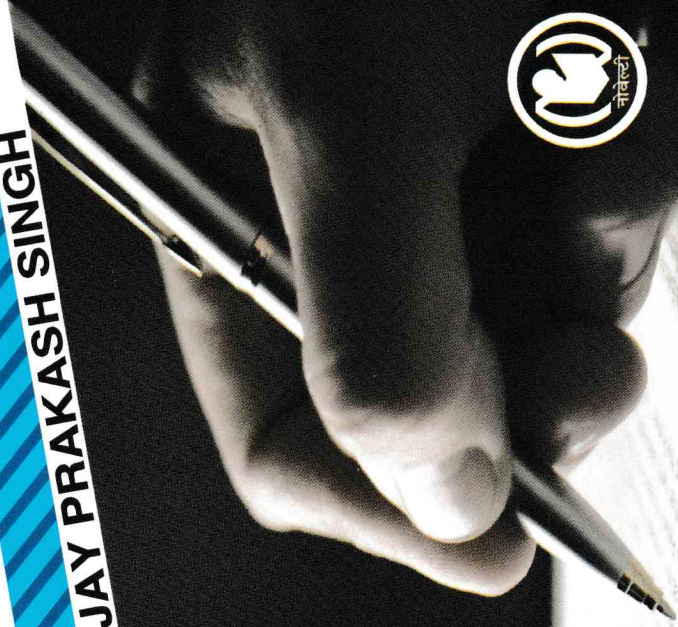
T.S. Eliot



And His Three Essays

AN INTRODUCTION & CRITICISM

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Introduction

T. S. Eliot (Taylor Stearns Eliot) was born in America in 1888-1965. He is widely known as one of the greatest English Poets, play-wrights, journalists, theorists and critics. He holds an important place amongst the modern literary men. He is the leader of his age. He has dominated the literary scene ever since he published his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917) and 'The Waste Land (1922)' which revolutionized poetic sensibility and technique in the first quarter of that century. His other chief critical works are : The Sacred Wood (1921), Homage to John Dryden (1924), For Lancelot Andrews (1928), Selected Essays (1932), The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism (1933), Elizabethan Essays (1934), Essays Ancient and Modern (1936). He also edited famous magazines, The Egoist and the Criterion. Few Writers have had so deep and sustained an influence on their contemporaries.

For about one hundred and fifty years before Eliot began to write, Romanticism and Humanism had captivated literature. In the beginning of the twentieth century there was a revolt against romantic and humanistic tendencies. With the advent of T. S. Eliot this opposition got stronger. The Chief exponent of his opposition in America was Irving Babbitt who questioned romanticism in his

work, Rousseau and Romanticism. He was supported by Paul Elmer Moore too. Influenced by Babbitt, Eliot was ready to bid a final goodbye to romanticism. That is why Eliot is regarded as a classicist and can be classified with Dr. Johnson, Ben Jonson, Dryden who were no-classical. Eliot excelled even these neo-classical critics. He pronounced critical theories and concepts which were different from theirs. He offered fresh and new insights and perspectives.

Eliot belongs to the tradition of Aristotle, Dryden and Arnold. The tradition that has, from time to time, tried to preserve and restore the classical norms or order and discipline in thought and expression. It is often argued that in the formulation of his critical principles, Eliot was deeply influenced by Arnold, Hulme and Pound. Indeed, there is a striking correspondence of attitude between these critics and Eliot. Arnold, for instance, has defined the critical 'endeavour in all branches of knowledge....to see the object as in itself it really is.' Hulme's opposition against romantic sensibility are too familiar, and Pound is never tired of idealizing concentrated attention....objectivity and again objectivity, and expression. While it is possible that these three anti-romantics might have reinforced Eliot's own classical reactions against the carelessness of the Georgians and the impressionism of such critics as Swinburne, Symonds and Middleton Murry. It is obvious that Eliot's basic critical standing is uniquely his own, because none of his predecessors or contemporaries had visualized in totality the multiple implication of 'tradition' and its organic relationship with 'the individual talent'. For over forty years he remained occupied

with a set of norms which constantly tested on the pulse of his own experience as a poet and dramatist.

Often hailed as the successor to poet-critics such as John Dryden, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot's literary criticism informs his poetry just as his experiences as a poet shape his critical work. Though famous for insisting on "objectivity" in art, Eliot's essays actually map a highly personal set of preoccupations, responses and ideas about specific authors and works of art, as well as formulate more general theories on the connections between poetry, culture and society. Perhaps his best-known essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was first published in 1919 and soon after included in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920). Eliot attempts to do two things in this essay: he first redefines "tradition" by emphasizing the importance of history to writing and understanding poetry, and he then argues that poetry should be essentially "impersonal", that is separate and distinct from the personality of its writer. Eliot's idea of tradition is complex and unusual, involving something he describes as "the historical sense" which is a perception of "the pastness of the past" but also of its "presence." For Eliot, past works of art form an order or "tradition"; however, that order is always being altered by a new work which modifies the "tradition" to make room for itself. This view, in which "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past," requires that a poet should be familiar with almost all literary history—not just the immediate past but the distant past and not

just the literature of his or her own country but the whole "mind of Europe."

A poet, Eliot maintains, must "self-sacrifice" to this special awareness of the past; once this awareness is achieved, it will erase any trace of personality from the poetry because the poet has become a mere medium for expression. Using the analogy of a chemical reaction, Eliot explains that a "mature" poet's mind works by being a passive "receptacle" of images, phrases and feelings which are combined, under immense concentration, into a new "art emotion". For Eliot, true art has nothing to do with the personal life of the artist but is merely the result of a greater ability to synthesize and combine, an ability which comes from deep study and comprehensive knowledge. Though Eliot's belief that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" sprang from what he viewed as the excesses of Romanticism, many scholars have noted how continuous Eliot's thought- and the whole of Modernism-is with that of the Romantics'; his "impersonal poet" even has links with John Keats, who proposed a similar figure in "the chameleon poet." But Eliot's belief that critical study should be "diverted" from the poet to the many detractors, especially those who question Eliot's insistence on canonical works as standards of greatness, it is difficult to overemphasize the essay's influence. It has shaped generations of poets, critics and theorists and is a key text in modern literary criticism.

Eliot says that tradition is not the handing down, or following the ways of the ancients blindly. Tradition is not a blind adherence to the ways of the previous generation or generations. It is different from imitation, or a mere repetition of what has already been achieved. Tradition can not be inherited. It can only be obtained with great labour. It involves a historical sense which enables a poet to perceive not only the pastness of the past but also its presence. A creative artist, though he lives in a particular milieu, does not work merely with his own generation in view. He does not take his own age, or the literature of that period only as a separate entity, but acts the conviction that in general the whole literature of the continent from classical age of the Greeks onwards and in particular the literature of his own country, is to be taken as a harmonious whole. His own creative efforts are not apart from it but a part of it. A writer thus learn to value tradition by acquiring the historical sense, which enables the writer to feel vividly the times he belongs to and, at the same time, not to lose sight of that timelessness that belongs to the creative as a whole. It is the sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of timeless and of the temporal together. It is what makes a writer traditional. It also makes the writer most acutely conscious of his place in time; by a right valuation of what is called tradition, the writer becomes conscious of his own contemporaneity.

The poet who understands the presence of the past, also understands his responsibilities and difficulties as an artist. Such an artist will fully realize that he must inevitably be judged by the

standards of the past. In saying that an artist is finally to be judged by the standards of the past, Eliot does not imply that he is to be pronounced better or worse than the previous critics in judging their works. This really implies that a contemporary work is to be compared with great works of the past, and each is measured by the other. To conform merely would be for the new work now really to conform at all. There would be nothing new in it, and it would not be a work of art at all. A work may be individual and appear to conform. It will be a facility to classify the works of art into the categories of 'individual' and 'traditional'.

Eliot asserts about impersonal theory that the artist must continually surrender himself to something which is more valuable than himself, i.e., the literary tradition. He must allow his poetic sensibility to be shaped and modified by the past. He must continue to acquire the sense of tradition throughout his career. In the beginning his self, his individuality, may assert itself but as his powers mature there must be greater and greater extinction of personality. He must acquire greater and greater objectivity. His emotions and passions must be depersonalized; he must be as impersonal and objective as a scientist. The personality of the artist is not important; the important thing is his sense of tradition. A good poem is a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. He must forget his personal joys and sorrows, and be absorbed in acquiring a sense of tradition and expressing in his poetry. Thus the poet's personality is merely a medium, having the same significance as a catalytic agent, or a receptacle in which

chemical reaction take place. That is why Eliot holds that, "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry".

The emotion of poetry is different from the personal emotions of the poet. His personal emotions may be simple or crude, but emotion of his poetry may be complex and refined. It is mistaken notion that the poet must express new emotions that result in much eccentricity in poetry. It is not the business of the poet to find new emotions. He may express only ordinary emotions, but he must impart to them a new significance and a new meaning. And it is not necessary that they should be his personal emotions. Even emotions which he has never personally experienced can serve the purpose of the poetry. (For example, emotions which result from the reading of books can serve his turn.) Eliot rejects Wordsworth's theory of poetry having "its origin in emotions recollected in tranquility" and points out that in the process of poetic composition there is neither emotion nor recollection, nor tranquility. In the poetic process, there is only concentration of a number of experiences, and a new thing results from this concentration. And this process of concentration is neither conscious nor deliberate; it is a passive one. There is, no doubt, that there are elements in the poetic process which are conscious and deliberate. The difference between a good and a bad poet is that a bad poet is conscious where he should be unconscious and unconscious where he should be conscious. It is his consciousness of the wrong kind which makes a poem personal, whereas mature

art must be impersonal. But Eliot does not tell us when a poet should be conscious, and when not. The point has been left vague and indeterminate.

"Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality." Thus Eliot does not deny personality or emotion to the poet. Only, he must depersonalize his emotions. There should be an extinction of his personality. The impersonality can be achieved only when the poet surrenders himself completely to the work that is to be done. And the poet can know what is to be done, only if he acquires a sense of tradition, the historic sense which makes him conscious, not only of the present, but also of the present moment of the past, not only of what is dead, but of what is already living.

Eliot next proceeds to consider the qualifications of a critic. The foremost quality which an ideal critic must have is a highly developed sense of fact. The sense of fact is rare gift. It is not frequently met with, and it is very slow to develop. The value of a practitioner's criticism- say, that of a poet on his own art, 'workshop criticism' as Eliot elsewhere calls it- lies in the fact that he is dealing with facts which he understands, and so can also help us to understand them. Eliot's own criticism is such 'workshop criticism', and Eliot is all praises for such critics and their criticism. There is a large part of criticism which seeks to 'interpret' author and his work. But most of such interpretation is no interpretation at all. It is mere fiction; the critic gives his views, his impressions

of the work, and so is false and misleading Eliot has no use for such 'impressionistic' criticism; it gives us no insight into the work under study. True interpretation is no interpretation at all; it is merely putting the reader in possession of the facts which he might have missed otherwise. The true critic himself knows the facts about a work of art- its conditions, its settings, its genesis- and puts them before his readers in simple and easy manner. Thus it is clear that by 'facts' Eliot means the various technical aspects of a work. Comparison and analysis are the chief tools of a critic. These are the tools of the critic, he must use them with care and intelligence.

Comparison and analysis can be possible only when the critic knows the facts about works which are to be compared and analysed. He must know the facts about the work of art- technical elements like its structure, content, and theme- and not waste his time in such irrelevant fact-hunting as the inquiry into the number of times, giraffes are mentioned in the English novel. However, the method of comparison and analysis, even when used injudiciously, is preferable to 'interpretation' in the conventional sense. Facts, even facts of the lowest order, can not corrupt taste, while impressionistic criticism, like that of Coleridge and Goethe, is always misleading. The function of criticism is to educate taste or, as Eliot puts it elsewhere, to promote enjoyment and understanding of literature. Now facts, however trivial, can never corrupt taste; they can only gratify taste. Critics like Goethe or Coleridge, who supply opinion or fancy, are the real corrupters.

In the end, Eliot cautions us not to become slave to facts and bother about such trivialities as the laundry bills of Shakespeare. Such fact-hunting is not criticism. Similarly, he warns us against the various taste for reading about works of art instead of reading the works themselves.

Eliot's emphasis on facts makes it clear that his critical stand is with such New Critics as F.R. Leavis and I. A. Richards. He comments textual criticism, but he is against the 'lemon-squeezer' school of critics who try to squeeze every drop of meaning out words. A critic should concentrate on the text, compare and analyse, but he should never stoop to trivialities or empty hair-splitting. A good critic is objective, his judgment is based on facts, he is guided by tradition, the accumulated wisdom of ages and not by his "inner voice". He does not indulge in mere expression of opinion or fancy. Eliot is against impressionistic criticism, but he does not expound any theories or lay down any rules and principles. Impressionistic criticism is erratic, while adherence to rigid theories hamper the critic and curtails his freedom.

The critic should be guided by facts and facts alone. He should approach the work of art with a free mind, unprejudiced by any theories, or pre-conceived notions. Only then can he be completely objective and impersonal. It is in this way that criticism approximates to position of science. It is only in this way that criticism becomes a co-operative activity, the critic of one age co-operates with critics of the previous ages in the common pursuit of truth. Such truths are provisional, for 'truths' of one age are

likely to be modified and corrected by truths discovered by future ages. In this objective-scientific attitude Eliot is different from all other previous English critics. Herein lies his individuality and originality. He is like a scientist working with an open mind and co-operating with other, for the realization of truth which he knows can only be tentative.

In Eliot's opinion, an opinion which he has expressed earlier also, every generation must provide its own literary criticism. "Each generation brings to the contemplation of art its own categories of appreciation, makes its own demands upon art, and has its own uses of art." It is not merely a matter of change in tastes and fashions; the matter is much deeper. Every generation is subjected to new influences, and thus is modified by its appreciation of earlier works of art. Not only that, "an important work of literary criticism can alter and expand the content of the term 'literary criticism' itself". The very concept of literary criticism, changes from age to age. For example, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* has made literary criticism look different from earlier criticism, and the criticism to-day is in direct descent from Coleridge. Coleridge showed the relevance of philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, etc. to criticism, and no future critic can ignore this relevance.

Modern criticism is characterized by great variety and richness, but this very variety and richness are the sources of its weakness. They have obscured the ultimate purpose of criticism. The weakness of modern criticism is an uncertainty about the aims of criticism. The modern critic is not definite about his goal:

criticism has lost its aims. The confusion arises from devoting too much attention to the other social sciences. The humanities and the sciences has grown very complex and intricate, and as the literary critics to-day pay excessive attention to them, they are confused and forgetful of their own objectives. No doubt, we can not return to the state of literary criticism before Coleridge; there is also no doubt that the social sciences have their own relevance to criticism, and in the modern age there can be no 'pure' literary criticism. But the critic must be clear about the aims of criticism, and take care that his criticism remains literary criticism and does not become something else. In other words, Eliot suggests that a middle course should be followed. Extremes will not do. Neither should the other sciences be totally ignored, nor should the critic be excessively preoccupied with them.

Another method of criticism which goes beyond the frontiers of criticism is the method under "of the lemon-squeezer school of criticism." The critics of this school analyse a poem, without reference to the poet or to his other works, stanza by stanza and line by line, "extract, squeeze, tease, press every drop of meaning out of it that one can". This school has its origin in the investigations of Prof. Richards regarding the best way of teaching appreciation of poetry, and the verbal subtleties of Prof. Empson. This method is healthy reaction against the diversion of attention from the poetry of the poem. Its one great merit is that it focuses attention of the poetry, and tries to find out what a particular poem means. However, this school has also its own dangers and

limitations. These limitations are three. First, it assumes that there is just one interpretation of the poem as a whole, and that is the interpretation given by the critic. No doubt, the explanations and allusions, and other facts may be given in this way. But as far as the interpretation of the poem as a whole, or the meaning of the poem as a whole, is concerned, it will differ from one sensitive reader to another. Each must interpret the poem himself, and must not accept the interpretation provided by the critic. Secondly, there is the danger of assuming that the interpretation of a poem is also an account of what the poet, consciously or unconsciously, was trying to do. An explanation of a poem can not be an accountant of how it was written. The third danger is that a detailed explanation of analysis of a poem comes in way of the enjoyment of that poem. For example, Eliot had enjoyed reading a poem, but after going through its analysis, he could not recover his previous feeling about it. Interpretation of a poem should come from the reader himself, the critic should merely help him in the task of interpretation. As Eliot tells us in his essay on *The Function of Criticism*, the critic should have a sense of fact, and should place the facts about a poem before the readers, and then leave them to make their own interpretation. Facts can not corrupt, but opinion and fancy may.

Thus Eliot says that a work which does not promote enjoyment and understanding of literature, may be contribution to sociology, logic or to any other social sciences, but certainly it is not work of literary criticism. Similarly, biographical criticism, too, lies beyond the frontiers of criticism, as it directs our attention

to the poet, away from the poetry. The "source-hunting" critics may provide us valuable fact and information regarding the times of the poet, ideas current as the time, the state of language, etc., but they, too, pass beyond the frontiers of criticism as they distract our attention from the appreciation and enjoyment of poetry. The right type of critic is one who places the facts about the poem before the reader, makes him look at in a way in which he has never looked at it before, without any prejudice, and then leaves him to interpret and enjoy it according to "his own sensibility, intelligence and capacity of wisdom." The interpretations of a poem differ, and the critic should help the reader to interpret the poem himself, according to his own light. The true critic must steer the middle course between mere impressionism, and too much explanation. Criticism is not a science, nor must it be purely subjective. Criticism of critics like F.R. Leavis, on the one hand, and of Walter Pater, on the other, lies beyond the frontiers of criticism.



Tradition and the Individual Talent

I

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence. We cannot refer to 'the tradition' or to 'a tradition'; at most, we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is 'traditional' or even 'too traditional'. Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely a probative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archeology.

Certainly the word is not likely to appear in our appreciations of living or dead writers. Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius. We know, or think we know, from the enormous mass of critical writing that has appeared in the French language the critical method or habit of the French; we only conclude (we are such unconscious people)

that the French are 'more critical' than we, and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were the less spontaneous. Perhaps they are; but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism. One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the

first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. The historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, has appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments from an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values

of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.

In a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other. To conform merely would be for the new not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value—a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other.

To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period. The first course is inadmissible, the second is an important experience of youth, and the third is pleasant and

highly desirable supplement. The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputation. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsman. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of the psychologist or not to the extent which we imagine; perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery. But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.

Someone said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did'. Precisely, and they are that which we know.

I am alive to a usual objection to what is clearly part of my programme for the *métier* of poetry. The objection is that the doctrine requires a ridiculous amount of erudition (pedantry), a claim which can be rejected by appeal to the lives of poets in any pantheon. It will even be affirmed that much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility. While, however, we persist in believing

that a poet ought to know as much as will not encroach upon his necessary receptivity and necessary laziness, it is not desirable to confine knowledge to whatever can be put into a useful shape for examinations, drawing-rooms, or the still more pretentious modes of publicity. Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I therefore invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.

II

Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers; if we seek not Blue-book knowledge but the enjoyment of poetry,

and ask for a poem, we shall seldom find it. I have tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. The other aspect of this impersonal theory of poetry is the relation of the poem to its author. And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of 'personality', nor being necessarily more interesting, or having 'more to say', but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.

The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two kinds: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience

not of art. It may formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever: composed out of feelings solely. Canto XV of the *inferno* (Brunetto Latin) is a working up of the emotion evident in the situation; but the effect, though single as that of any work of art, is obtained by considerable complexity of detail. The last quatrain gives an image, a feeling attaching to an image, which 'came', which did not develop simply out of what proceeds, but which was probably in suspension in the poet's mind until the proper combination arrived for it to add itself to. The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi ethical criterion of 'sublimity' misses the mark. For it is not the 'greatness', the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts. The episode of Paolo and Francesca employs a definite emotion, but the intensity of the poetry is something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience it may give the impression of. It is no more intense, furthermore, than Canto XXVI the voyage of Ulysses, which has

not the direct dependence upon an emotion. Great variety is possible in the process of transmutation of emotion: the murder of Agamemnon, or the agony of Othello, gives an artistic effect apparently closer to a possible original than the scenes from Dante. In the *Agamemnon*, the artistic emotion approximates to the emotion of an actual spectator; in *Othello* to the emotion of the protagonist himself. But the difference between art and the event is always absolute; the combination which is the murder of Agamemnon is probably as complex as that which is the voyage of Ulysses. In either case there has been a fusion of elements. The ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly perhaps because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together.

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

I will quote a passage which is unfamiliar enough to be regarded with fresh attention in the light-or darkness-of these observations :

*And now methinks I could e'en chide myself
 For doating on her beauty, though her death
 Shall be revenged after no common action.
 Does the silkworm expend her yellow labours
 For thee? For thee does she undo herself?
 Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
 For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute?
 Why does yon fellow falsify highways,
 And put his life between the judge's lips,
 To refine such a thing-keeps horse and men
 To beat their valours for her?*

In this passage (as is evident if it is taken in its context) there is a combination of positive and negative emotions: an intensely strong attraction toward beauty and an equally intense fascination by the ugliness which is contrasted with it and which destroys it. This balance of contrasted emotion is in the dramatic situation to which the speech is pertinent but that situation alone is inadequate to it. This is, so to speak, the structural emotion, provided by the drama. But the whole effect, the dominant tone, is due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no means superficially evident, have combined with it to give us a new art emotion.

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude,

or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not 'recollected', and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is 'tranquil' only in that it is a passive attending upon the event. Of course this is not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him 'personal'. Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

III

This essay proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism, and confine itself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry. To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad. There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is an expression of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.



The Function of Criticism

I

WRITING several years ago on the subject of the relation of the new to the old in art, I formulated a view to which I still adhere, in sentences which I take the liberty of quoting, because the present paper is an application of the principle they express:

'The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.'

I was dealing then with the artist, and the sense of tradition which, it seemed to me, the artist should have; but it was generally a problem of order; and the function of criticism seems to be

essentially a problem of order too. I thought of literature then as I think of it now, of the literature of the world, of the literature of Europe, of the literature of a single country, not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as 'organic wholes', as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance. There is accordingly something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to earn and to obtain his unique position. A common inheritance and a common cause unite artists consciously or unconsciously: it must be admitted that the union is mostly unconscious. Between the true artists of any time there is, I believe, an unconscious community. And, as our instincts of tidiness imperatively command us not to leave to the haphazard of unconsciousness what we can attempt to do consciously, we are forced to conclude that what happens unconsciously we could bring about, and form into a purpose, if we made a conscious attempt. The second-rate artist, of course, cannot afford to surrender himself to any to any common action; for his chief task is the assertion of all the trifling differences which are his distinction: only the man who has so much to give that he can forget himself in his work can afford to collaborate, to exchange, to contribute.

If such views are held about art, it follows that *a fortiori* whoever holds them must hold similar views about criticism. When I say criticism, I mean of course in this place the commendation and exposition of works of art by means of written words; for of the general use of the word 'criticism' to mean such writings, as

Matthew Arnold uses it in his essay, I shall presently make several qualifications. No exponent of criticism (in this limited sense) has, I presume, ever made the preposterous assumption that criticism is an autotelic activity. I do not deny that art may be affirmed to serve ends beyond itself; but art is not required to be aware of these ends, and indeed performs its function, whatever that may be, according to various theories of value, much better by indifference to them. Criticism, on the other hand, must always profess an end in view, which roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste. The critic's task, therefore, appears to be quite clearly cut out for him; and it ought to be comparatively easy to decide whether he performs it satisfactorily, and in general, what kinds of criticism are useful and what are otiose. But on giving the matter a little attention, we perceive that criticism, far from being a simple and orderly field of beneficent activity, from which impostors can be readily ejected, is no better than a Sunday park of contending and contentious orators, who have not even arrived at the articulation of their differences. Here, one would suppose, was a place for quite co-operative labour. The critic, one would suppose, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks-tares to which we are all subject-and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgment. When we find that quite the contrary prevails, we begin to suspect that the critic owes his livelihood to the violence and extremity of his opposition to other critics, or else to some trifling oddities of his own with which he contrives to season the opinions which men already hold, and which out of

vanity or sloth they prefer to maintain. We are tempted to expel the lot.

Immediately after such an eviction, or as soon as relief has abated our rage, we are compelled to admit that there remain certain books, certain essays, certain sentences, certain men, who have been 'useful' to us. And our next step is to attempt to classify these, and find out whether we establish any principles for deciding what kinds of books should be preserved, and what aims and methods of criticism should be followed.

II

The view of the relation of the work of art to art, of the work of literature to literature, of 'criticism' to criticism, which I have outlined above, seemed to me natural and self-evident. I owe to Mr. Middleton Murry my perception of the contentious character of the problem; or rather, my perception that there is a definite and final choice involved. To Mr. Murry I feel an increasing debt of gratitude. Most of our critics are occupied in labour of obnubilation; in reconciling, in hushing up, in patting down, in squeezing in, in glozing over, in concocting pleasant sedatives, in pretending that the only difference between themselves and others is that they are nice men and the others of very doubtful repute. Mr. Murry is not one of these. He is aware that there are definite positions to be taken, and that now and then one must actually reject something and select something else. He is not the anonymous writer who in a literary paper several years ago asserted that Romanticism and Classicism are much the same thing, and

that the true Classical Age in France was the Age which produced the Gothic cathedrals and-Jeanne d'Arc. With Mr. Murry's formulation of Classicism and Romanticism I cannot agree; the difference seems to me rather the difference between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic. But what Mr. Murry does show is that there are at least two attitudes toward literature and toward everything, and that you cannot hold both. And the attitude which he professes appears to imply that the other has no understanding in England whatever. For it is made a national, a racial issue.

Mr. Murry makes his issue perfectly clear. 'Catholicism', he says, 'stands for the principle of unquestioned spiritual authority outside the individual; that is also the principle of Classicism in literature.' Within the orbit within which Mr. Murry's discussion moves, this seems to me an unimpeachable definition; through it is of course not all that there is to be said about either Catholicism or Classicism. Those of us who find ourselves supporting what Mr. Murry calls Classicism believe that men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves. I am aware that 'outside' and 'inside' are terms which provide unlimited opportunity for quibbling, and that no psychologist would tolerate a discussion which shuffled such base coinage; I will presume that Mr. Murry and myself can agree that for our purpose these counters are adequate, and concur in disregarding the admonitions of our psychological friends. If you find that you have to imagine it as outside, then it is outside. If, then, a man's interest is political, he must, I presume, profess an allegiance to principles, or to a form

of government, or to a monarch; and if he is interested in religion, and has one, to a Church; and if he happens to be interested in literature, he must acknowledge, it seems to me, just that sort of allegiance which I endeavoured to put forth in the preceding section. There is, nevertheless, an alternative, which Mr. Murry has expressed. 'The English writer, the English divine, the English statesman, inherit no rules from their forebears; they inherit only this: a sense that in the last resort they must depend upon the inner voice.' This statement does, I admit, appear to cover certain cases; it throws a flood of light upon Mr. Lloyd George. But why '*in the last resort*'? Do they, then, avoid the dictates of the inner voice up to the last extremity? My belief is that those who possess this inner voice are ready enough to hearken to it, and will hear no other. The inner voice, in fact, sounds remarkably like an old principle which has been formulated by an elder critic in the now familiar phrase of 'doing as one likes'. The possessors of the inner voice ride ten in a compartment to a football match at Swansea, listening to the inner voice, which breathes the eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust.

Mr. Murry will say, with some show of justice, that this is a wilful misrepresentation. He says: 'If they (the English writer, divine, statesman) dig *deep enough* in their pursuit of self-knowledge-a piece of mining done not with the intellect alone, but with the whole man-they will come upon a self that is universal'-an exercise far beyond the strength of our football enthusiasts. It is an exercise, however, which I believe was of enough interest to Catholicism for several handbooks to be written

on its practice. But the Catholic practitioners were, I believe, with the possible exception of certain heretics, not palpitating Narcissi; the Catholic did not believe that God and himself were identical. 'The man who truly interrogates himself will ultimately hear the voice of God', Mr. Murry says. In theory, this leads to a form of pantheism which I maintain is not European-just as Mr. Murry maintain that 'Classicism' is not English. For its practical results one may refer to the verses of *Hudibras*.

I did not realize that Mr. Murry was the spokesman for a considerable sect, until I read in the editorial columns of a dignified daily that 'magnificent as the representatives of the classical genius have been in England. They are not the sole expressions of the English character, which remains at bottom obstinately "humorous" and nonconformist'. This writer is moderate in using the qualification sole, and brutally frank in attributing this 'humorousness' to 'the unreclaimed Teutonic element in us'. But it strikes me that Mr. Murry, and this other voice, are either too obstinate or too tolerant. The question is, the first question, not what comes natural or what comes easy to us, but what is right? Either one attitude is better than the other, or else it is indifferent. But how can such a choice be indifferent? Surely the reference to racial origins, or the mere statement that the French are thus, and the English otherwise, is not expected to settle the question: which, of two antithetical views, is right? And I cannot understand why the opposition between classicism and Romanticism should be profound enough in Latin countries (Mr. Murry says it is) and yet of no significance among ourselves. For if the French are naturally

classical, why should there be any 'opposition' in France, any more than there is here? And if Classicism is not natural to them, but something acquired, why not acquire it here? Were the French in the year 1600 classical, and the English in the same year romantic? A more important difference, to my mind, is that the French in the year 1600 had already a more mature prose.

III

This discussion may seem to have led us a long way from the subject of this paper. But it was worth my while to follow Mr. Murry's comparison of Outside Authority with the Inner Voice. For to those who obey the inner voice (perhaps 'obey' is not the word) nothing that I can say about criticism will have the slightest value. For they will not be interested in the attempt to find any common principles for the pursuit of criticism. Why have principles, when one has the inner voice? If I like a thing, that is all I want; and if enough of us, shouting all together, like it, that should be all that you (who don't like it) ought to want. The law of art, said Mr. Clutton Brock, is all case law. And we can not only like whatever we like to like but we can like it for any reason we choose. We are not, in fact, concerned with literary perfection at all—the search for perfection is a sign of pettiness, for it shows that the writer has admitted the existence of an unquestioned spiritual authority outside himself, to which he has attempted to conform. We are not in fact interested in art. We will not worship Baal. 'The principle of classical leadership is that obeisance is made to the office or to the tradition, never to the man.' And we want, not principle, but men.

Thus speaks the Inner Voice. It is a voice to which for convenience, we may give a name: and the name I suggest is Whiggery.

IV

Leaving, then, those whose calling and election are sure and returning to those who shamefully depend upon tradition and the accumulated wisdom of time, and restricting the discussion to those who sympathise with each other in this frailty, we may comment for a moment upon the use of the terms 'critical' and 'creative' by one whose place, on the whole, is with the weaker brethren. Matthew Arnold distinguishes far too bluntly, it seems to me, between the two activities: he overlooks the capital importance of criticism in the work of creation itself. Probably, indeed, the larger part of the labour of an author is composing his work is critical labour; the labour of shifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this frightful toil is as much critical as creative. I maintain even that the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism; and (as I think I have said before) that some creative writers are superior to others solely because their critical faculty is superior. There is a tendency, and I think it is a whiggery tendency, to decry this critical toil of the artist; to propound the thesis that the great artist is an unconscious artist, unconsciously inscribing on his banner the words Muddle Through. Those of us who are Inner Deaf Mutes are, however, sometimes compensated by a humble conscience, which, though without oracular expertness, counsels us to do the best we can,

reminds us that our compositions ought to be as free from defects as possible (to atone for their lack of inspiration), and, in short, makes us waste a good deal of time. We are aware, too, that the critical discrimination which comes so hardly to us has in more fortunate men flashed in the very heat of creation; and we do not assume that because works have been composed without apparent critical labour, no critical labour has been done. We do know what previous labour have prepared, or what goes on, in the way of criticism, all the time in the minds of the creators.

But this affirmation recoils upon us. If so large a part of creation is really criticism, is not a large part of what is called 'critical writing' really creative? If so, is there not creative criticism in the ordinary sense? The answer seems to be, that there is no equation. I have assumed as axiomatic that a creation, a work of art, is autotelic; and that criticism, by definition, is about something other than itself. Hence you cannot fuse creation with criticism as you can fuse criticism with creation. The critical activity finds its highest, its true fulfilment in a kind of union with creation in the labour of the artist.

But no writer is completely self-sufficient, and many creative writers have a critical activity which is not all discharged into their work. Some seem to require to keep their critical powers in condition for the real work by exercising them miscellaneous; others, on completing a work, need to continue the critical activity by commenting on it. There is no general rule. And as men can learn from each other, so some of these treatises have been useful to other writers. And some of them have been useful to those who were not writers.

At one time I was inclined to take the extreme position that the only critics worth reading were the critics who practiced, and practiced well, the art of which they wrote. But I had to stretch this frame to make some important inclusions; and I have since been in search of a formula which should cover everything I wished to include, even if it included more than I wanted. And the most important qualification which I have been able to find, which accounts for the peculiar importance of the criticism of practitioners, is that a critic must have a very highly developed sense of fact. This is by no means a trifling or frequent gift. And it is not one which easily wins popular commendations. The sense of fact is something very slow to develop, and its complete development means perhaps the very pinnacle of civilization. For there are so many spheres of fact to be mastered, and our outermost sphere of fact, of knowledge, of control, will be ringed with narcotic fancies in the sphere beyond. To the member of the Browning Study Circle, the discussion of poets about poetry may seem arid, technical, and limited. It is merely that the practitioners have clarified and reduced to a state of fact all the feelings that the member can only enjoy in the most nebulous form; the dry technique implies, for those who have mastered it, all that the member thrills to; only that has been made into something precise, tractable, under control. That, all events, is one reason for the value of the practitioner's criticism—he is dealing with his facts, and he can help us to do the same.

And at every level of criticism I find the same necessity regnant. There is a large part of critical writing which consists in

'interpreting' an author, a work. This is not on the level of the Study Circle either; it occasionally happens that one person obtains and understanding of another, or a creative writer, which he can partially communicate, and which we feel to be true and illuminating. It is difficult to confirm the 'interpretation' by external evidence. To anyone who is skilled in fact on this level there will be evidence enough. But who is to prove his own skill? And for every success in this type of writing there are thousands of impostures. Instead of insight, you get a fiction. Your test is to apply it again and again to the original, with your view of the original to guide you. But there is no one to guarantee your competence, and once again we find ourselves in a dilemma.

We must ourselves decide what is useful to us and what is not; and it is quite likely that we are not competent to decide. But it is fairly certain that 'interpretation' (I am not touching upon the acrostic element in literature) is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all, but merely putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed. I have had some experience of Extension lecturing, and I have found only two ways of leading any pupils to like anything with the right liking: to present them with a selection of the simpler kind of facts about a work-its conditions, its setting, its genesis-or else to spring the work on them in such a way that they were not prepared to be prejudiced against it. There were many facts to help them with Elizabethan drama: the poems of T. E. Hulme only needed to be read aloud to have immediate effect.

Comparison and analysis, I have said before, and Remy de Gourmont has said before me (a real master of fact-sometimes, I am afraid, when he moved outside of literature, a master illusionist of fact), are the chief tools of the critic. It is obvious indeed that they are tools, to be handled with care, and not employed in an inquiry into the number of times giraffes are mentioned in the English novel. They are not used with conspicuous success by many contemporary writers. You must know what to compare and what to analyse. The late Professor Ker had skill in the use of these tools. Comparison and analysis need only the cadavers on the table; but interpretation is always producing parts of the body from its pockets, and fixing them in place. And any book, any essay, any note in Notes and Queries, which produces a fact even of the lowest order about a work of art is a better piece of work than we nine-tenths of the most pretensions critical journalism, in journals or in books. We assume, of course that.. are masters and not servants of facts, and that we know that the discovery of Shakespeare's laundry bills would not be of much use to us; but we must always reserve final judgment as to the futility of the research which has discovered them, in the possibility that some genius will appear who will know of a use to which to put them. Scholarship, even in its humblest forms, has its rights; we assume that we know how to neglect it. Of course the multiplication of critical books and essay may create, and I have seen it create, a vicious taste for reading about works of art instead of reading the works themselves, it may supply opinion instead of educating taste. But fact cannot corrupt taste, it can at worst gratify one taste-a taste for history, let us say, or antiquities, or biography-under the

illusion that it is assisting another. The real corrupters are those who supply opinion or fancy; and Goethe and Coleridge are not guiltless-for what is Coleridge's Hamlet: is it an honest inquiry as far as the data permit, or is it an attempt to present Coleridge in an attractive costume?

We have not succeeded in finding such a test as anyone can apply; we have been forced to allow ingress to innumerable dull and tedious books; but we have, I think, found a test which, for those who are able to apply it, will dispose of the really vicious ones. And with this test we may return to the preliminary statement of the polity of literature and of criticism. For the kinds of critical work which we have admitted, there is the possibility of co-operative activity, with the further possibility of arriving at something outside of ourselves, which may provisionally be called truth. But if anyone complains that I have not defined truth, or fact, or reality, I can only say apologetically that it was not part of my purpose to do so, but only to find a scheme into which, whatever they are, they will fit, if they exist.



The Frontiers of Criticism

The thesis of this paper is that there are limits, exceeding which in one direction literary criticism ceases to be literary, and exceeding which in another it ceases to be criticism.

In 1923 I wrote an article entitled *The Function of Criticism*. I must have thought well of this essay ten years later, as I included it in my *Selected Essays*, where it is still to be found. On re-reading this essay recently, I was rather bewildered, wondering what all the fuss had been about-though I was glad to find nothing positively to contradict my present opinions. For, leaving aside a wrangle with Mr. Middleton Murry about 'the inner voice'-a dispute in which I recognize the old aporia of *Authority v. Individual Judgment*-I found it impossible to recall to mind the background of my outburst. I had made a number of statements with assurance and considerable warmth; and it would seem that I must have had in mind critics senior to myself one or more well-established critics senior to myself whose writings did not satisfy my requirements of what literary criticism should be. But I cannot recall a single book or essay, or the name of a single critic, as representative of the kind of impressionistic criticism which aroused my ire thirty-three years ago.

The only point in mentioning this essay now, is to call attention to the extent to which what I wrote on this subject in 1923 is 'dated'. Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* was published in 1925. A great deal has happened in literary criticism since this influential book came out; and my paper was written two years earlier. Criticism has developed and branched out in several directions. The term 'The New Criticism' is often employed by people without realizing what a variety it comprehends; but its currency does, I think, recognize the fact that the more distinguished critics of to-day, however widely they differ from each other, all differ in some significant way from the critics of a previous generation.

Many years ago I pointed out that every generation must provide its own literary criticism; for, as I said, 'each generation brings to the contemplation of art its own categories of appreciation, makes its own demands upon art, and has its own uses for art.' When I made this statement I am sure that I had in mind a good deal more than the changes of taste and fashion: I had in mind at least the fact that each generation, looking at masterpieces of the past in a different perspective, is affected in its attitude by a greater number of influences than those which bore upon the generation previous. But I doubt whether I had in mind the fact that an important work of literary criticism can alter and expand the content of the term 'literary criticism' itself. Some years ago I drew attention to the steady change in meaning of the word education from the sixteenth century to the present day, a change which had taken place owing to the fact that education

not only comprised more and more subjects, but was being supplied for or imposed upon more and more of the population. If we could follow the evolution of the term literary criticism in the same way, we would find something similar happening. Compare a critical masterpiece like Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* with the next great critical work to follow it, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. It is not merely that Johnson represents a literary tradition to the end of which he himself belongs, while Coleridge is defending the merits and criticizing the weakness of a new style. The difference more pertinent to what I have been saying, is due to the scope and variety of the interests which Coleridge brought to bear on his discussion of poetry. He established the relevance of philosophy, aesthetics and psychology; and once Coleridge had introduced these disciplines into literary criticism, future critics could ignore them only at their own risk. To appreciate Johnson an effort of historical imagination is needed; a modern critic can find much in common with Coleridge. The criticism of to-day, indeed, may be said to be in direct descent from Coleridge, who would, I am sure, were he alive now, take the same interest in the social sciences and in the study of language and semantics, that he took in the sciences available to him.

The consideration of literature in the light of one or more of these studies, is one of the two main causes of the transformation of literary criticism in our time. The other cause has not been so fully recognized. The increasing attention given to the study of English and American literature in our universities and indeed in our schools, has led to a situation in which many critics are teachers, and many teachers are critics. I am far from deploring

this situation: most of the really interesting criticism to-day is the work of men of letters who have found their way into universities, and of scholars whose critical activity has been first exercised in the classroom. And nowadays, when serious literary journalism is an inadequate, as well as precarious means of support for all but a very few, this is as it must be. Only, it means that the critic to-day may have a some-what different audience from that of his predecessors. I have the impression that serious criticism now is being written for a different, a more limited though not necessarily a smaller public than was that of the nineteenth century.

I was struck not long ago by an observation of Mr. Aldous Huxley in a preface to the English translation of *The Supreme Wisdom*, a book by a French psychiatrist, Dr. Hubert Benoit, on the psychology of Zen Buddhism. Mr. Huxley's observation responded to the impression which I had myself received from the remarkable book when I read it in French. Huxley is comparing Western psychiatry with the discipline of the East as found in Tao and Zen:

'The aim of Western psychiatry (he says) is to help the troubled individual to adjust himself to the society of less troubled individuals—individuals who are observed to be well adjusted to one another and the local institutions, but about whose adjustment to the fundamental Order of Things no enquiry is made.... But there is another kind of normality— a normality or perfect functioning.... Even a man who is perfectly adjusted to a deranged society can prepare himself, if he so desires, to become adjusted to the Nature of Things'.

The applicability of this to my present matter is not immediately obvious. But just as Western psychiatry, from a Zen Buddhist point of view, is confused or mistaken as to what healing is for, and its attitude needs really to be reversed, so I wonder whether the weakness of modern criticism is not an uncertainty as to what criticism is for? As to what benefit it is to bring, and to whom? Its very richness and variety have perhaps obscured its ultimate purpose. Every critic may have his eye on a definite goal, may be engaged on a task which needs no justification, and yet criticism itself may be lost as to its aims. If so, this is not surprising: for is it not now a common place, that the sciences and even the humanities have reached a point in development at which there is so much to know about any speciality, that no student has the time to know much about anything else? And the search for a curriculum which shall combine specialized study with some general education has surely been one of the problems most discussed in our universities.

We cannot, of course, go back to the universe of Aristotle or of St. Thomas Aquinas; and we cannot go back to the state of literary criticism before Coleridge. But perhaps we can do something to save ourselves from being overwhelmed by our own critical activity, by continually asking such a question as: when is criticism not literary criticism but something else?

I have been somewhat bewildered to find, from time to time, that I am regarded as one of the ancestors of modern criticism, if too old to be a modern critic myself. Thus in a book which I read recently by an author who is certainly a modern

critic, I find a reference to 'The New Criticism', by which, he says, 'I mean not only the American critics, but the whole critical movement that derives from T. S. Eliot'. I don't understand why the author should isolate me so sharply from the American critics; but on the other hand I fail to see any critical movement which can be said to derive from myself, though I hope that as an editor I gave the *New Criticism*, or some of it, encouragement and an exercise ground in *The Criterion*. However, I think that I should, to justify this apparent modesty, indicate what I consider my own contribution to literary criticism to have been, and what are its limitations. The best of my literary criticism-apart from a few notorious phrases which have had a truly embarrassing success in the world-consists of essays on poets and poetic dramatists who had influenced me. It is a by-product of my private poetry-workshop; or a prolongation of the thinking that went into the formation of my own verse. In retrospect, I see that I wrote best about poets whose work had influenced my own, and with whose poetry I had become thoroughly familiar, long before I desired to write about them, or had found the occasion to do so. My criticism has this in common with that of Ezra Pound, that its merits and its limitations can be fully appreciated only when it is considered in relation to the poetry I have written myself. In Pound's criticism there is a more didactic motive: the reader he had in mind, I think, was primarily the young poet whose style was still unformed. But it is the love of certain poets who had influenced him. And (as I said of myself) a prolongation of his thinking about his own work, that inspires an early book which remains one of the best of Pound's literary essays, *The Spirit of Romance*.

This kind of criticism of poetry by a poet, or what I have called workshop criticism, has one obvious limitation. What has no relation to the poet's own work, or what is antipathetic to him, is outside of his competence. Another limitation of workshop criticism is that the critic's judgment may be unsound outside of his own art. My valuations of poets have remained pretty constant throughout my life; in particular, my opinions about a number of living poets have remained unchanged. It is, however, not only for this reason, that what I have in mind, in talking as I am to-day about criticism, is the criticism of poetry. Poetry, as a matter of fact, is what most critics in the past have had in mind when generalizing about literature. The criticism of prose fiction is of comparatively recent institution, and I am not qualified to discuss it; but it seems to me to require a some-what different set of weights and measures from a poetry. It might, indeed, provide an interesting subject for some critic of criticism-one who was neither poet nor novelist to consider the differences between the ways in which the critic must approach the various genres of literature, and between the kinds of equipment needed. But poetry is the most convenient object of criticism to have in mind, when talking about criticism, simply for the reason that its formal qualities lend themselves most readily to generalization. In poetry, it might seem that style is everything. That is far from being true; but the illusion that in poetry we come nearer to a purely aesthetic experience makes poetry the most convenient genre of literature to keep in mind when we are discussing literary criticism itself. A good deal of contemporary criticism, originating at that point at which criticism merges into scholarship, and at which scholarship merges

into criticism, may be characterized as the criticism of explanation by origins. To make clear what I mean I shall mention two books which have had, in this connection, a rather bad influence. I do not mean that they are bad books. On the contrary: they are both books with which everyone should be acquainted. The first is John Livingston Lowes's *The Road to Xanadu*- a book which I recommended to every student of poetry who has not yet read it. The other is James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*- a book which I recommended every student of poetry to read-at least some pages of it. Livingston Lowes was a fine scholar, a good teacher, a lovable man and a man to whom I for one have private reasons to feel very grateful. James Joyce was a man of genius, a personal friend, and my citation here of *Finnegans Wake* is neither in praise nor dispraise of a book which is certainly in the category of works that can be called monumental. But the only obvious common characteristics of *The Road to Xanadu* and *Finnegans Wake* is that we may say of each: one book like this is enough.

For those who have never read *The Road to Xanadu*, I will explain that it is a fascinating piece of detection. Lowes ferreted out all the books which Coleridge had read (and Coleridge was an omnivorous and insatiable reader) and from which he had borrowed images or phrases to be found in *Kubla Khan* and *The Ancient Mariner*. The books that Coleridge read are many of them obscure and forgotten books-he read, for instance, every book of travels upon which he could lay his hands.

And Lowes showed, once and for all, that poetic originality is largely an original way of assembling the most disparate and

unlikely material to make a new whole. The demonstration is quite convincing, as evidence of how material is digested and transformed by the poetic genius. No one, after reading this book, could suppose that he understood *The Ancient Mariner* any better; nor was it in the least Dr. Lowes's intention to make the poem more intelligible as poetry. He was engaged on an investigation of process, an investigation which was strictly speaking, beyond the frontier of literary criticism. How such material as those scraps of Coleridge's reading became transmuted into great poetry remains as much of a mystery as ever. Yet a number of hopeful scholars have seized upon the Lowes method as offering a clue to the understanding of any poem by any poet who gives evidence of having read anything. 'I wonder', a gentleman from Indiana wrote to me a year or more ago, 'I wonder- it is possible that I am mad, of course' (this was his interjection, not mine; of course he was not in the least mad, merely slightly touched in one corner of his head from having read *The Road to Xanadu*) 'whether "the dead cats of civilization", "rotten hippo" and Mr. Kurtz have some tenuous connection with "that corpse you planted last year in your garden"'? This sounds like raving, unless you recognize the allusions: it is merely an earnest seeker trying to establish some connection between *The Waste Land* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Now while Dr. Lowes has fired such practitioners of hermeneutics with emulative zeal, *Finnegans Wake* has provided them with a model of what they would like all literary works to be. I must hasten to explain that I am not deriding or denigrating

the labours of those exegetists who have set themselves to unravel all the threads and follow all the clues in that book. If *Finnegans Wake* is to be understood at all-and we cannot judge it without such labour-that kind of detection must be pursued; and Messrs. Campbell and Robinson (to mention the authors of one such piece of work) have done an admirable job. My grievance if any is against James Joyce, the author of that monstrous masterpiece, without elaborate explanation, merely beautiful nonsense (very beautiful indeed when recited by an Irish voice as lovely as that of the author-would that he had recorded more of it!). Perhaps Joyce did not realize how obscure his book is. Whatever the final judgement (and I am not going to attempt a judgment) of the place of *Finnegans Wake* may be, I do not think that most poetry (for it is a kind of vast poem) is written in that way or requires that sort of dissection for its enjoyment and understanding. But I suspect that the enigmas provided by *Finnegans Wake* have given support to the error, prevalent nowadays, of mistaking explanation for understanding. After the production of my play *The Cocktail Party*, my mail was swollen for months with letters offering surprising solutions of what the writers believed to be the riddle of the play's meaning. And it was evident that the writers did not present the puzzle they thought I had set them-they liked it. Indeed, though they were unconscious of the fact, they invented the puzzle for the pleasure of discovering the solution.

Here I must admit that I am on one conspicuous occasion, not guiltless of having led critics into temptation. The notes to *The Waste Land*! I had at first intended only to put down all the

references for my quotations, with a view to spiking the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism. Then, when it came to print *The Waste Land* as a little book-for the poem on its first appearance in *The Dial* and in *The Criterion* had not notes whatever-it was discovered that the poem was inconveniently short, so I set to work to expand the notes, in order to provide a few more pages of printed matter, with the result that they became the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view to-day. I have sometimes thought of getting rid of these notes; but now they can never be unstuck. They have had almost greater popularity than the poem itself-anyone who bought my book of poems, and found that the notes to *The Waste Land* were not in it, would demand his money back. But I don't think that these notes did any harm to other poets: certainly I cannot think of any goods contemporary poet who has abused this same practice. (As for Miss Marianne Moore, her notes to poems are always pertinent, curious, conclusive, delightful and give no encouragement whatever to the researcher of origins.) No, it is not because of my bad example to other poets that I am penitent: it is because my notes stimulated the wrong kind of interest among the seekers of sources. It was just, no doubt, what I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston; but I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail.

While I was pondering this question of the attempt to understand a poem by explaining its origins, I came across a quotation from C.G. Jung which struck me as having some

relevance. The passage was quoted by Fr. Victor White, O.P. in his book *God and the Unconscious*. Fr. White quotes it in the course of exposing a radical difference between the method of Freud and the method of Jung.

'It is a generally recognized truth (says Jung) that physical events can be looked at in two ways, that is from the mechanistic and from the energetic standpoint. The mechanistic view is purely causal: from this standpoint an event is conceived as the result of a cause..... The energetic viewpoint on the other hand is in essence final; the event is traced from effect to cause on the assumption that energy forms the essential basis of changes in phenomena....'

The quotation is from the first essay in the volume *Contributions to Analytical Psychology*. I add another sentence, not quoted by Fr. White, which opens the next paragraph: 'both viewpoints are indispensable for the comprehension of physical phenomena.'

I take this simply as a suggestive analogy. One can explain a poem by investigating what it is made of and the causes that brought it about; and explanation may be a necessary preparation for understanding. But to understand a poem it is also necessary, and I should say in most instances still more necessary, that we should endeavour to grasp what the poetry is aiming to be; one might say-though it is long since I have employed such terms with any assurance-endeavouring to grasp its *entelechy*.

Perhaps the form of criticism in which the danger of excessive reliance upon causal explanation is greatest is the critical

biography, especially when the biographer supplements his knowledge of external facts with psychological conjectures about inner experience. I do not suggest that the personality and the private life of a dead poet constitute sacred ground on which the psychologist must not tread. The scientist must be at liberty to study such material as his curiosity leads him to investigate so long as the victim is dead and the laws of libel cannot be invoked to stop him. Nor is there any reason why biographies of poets should not be written. Furthermore, the biographer of an author should possess some critical ability; he should be a man of taste and judgment, appreciative of the work of the man whose biography he undertakes. And on the other hand any critic seriously concerned with a man's work should be expected to know something about the man's life. But a critical biography of a writer is a delicate task in itself; and the critic or the biographer who, without being a trained and practicing psychologist, brings to bear on his subject such analytical skill as he has acquired by reading books written by psychologists, may confuse the issues still further.

The question of how far information about the poet helps us to understand the poetry is not so simple as one might think. Each reader must answer it for himself, and must answer it not generally but in particular instances, for it may be more important in the case of one poet and less important in the case of another. For the enjoyment of poetry can be a complex experience in which several forms of satisfaction are mingled; and they may be mingled in different proportions for different readers. I will give an illustration. It is generally agreed that the greatest part of

Wordsworth's best poetry was written within a brief span of years—brief in itself, and brief in proportion to the whole span of Wordsworth's life. Various students of Wordsworth have propounded explanations to account for the mediocrity of his later output. Some years ago, Sir Herbert Read wrote a book on Wordsworth—an interesting book, though I think that his best appreciation of Wordsworth is found in a later essay in a volume entitled *A Coat of Many Colours*—in which he explained the rise and fall of Wordsworth's genius by the effects upon him of his affair with Annette Vallon, about which information had at that time come to light. More recently still, Mr. F. W. Bateson has written a book about Wordsworth which is also of considerable interest (his chapter on 'The Two Voices' does help to understand Wordsworth's style). In this book he maintains that Annette doesn't figure nearly so importantly as Sir Herbert Read had thought, and that the real secret was that Wordsworth fell in love with his sister Dorothy; that this explains, in particular, the Lucy poems, and explains why, after Wordsworth's marriage, his inspiration dried up. Well, he may be right: his argument is very plausible. But the real question, which every reader of Wordsworth must answer for himself, is: does it matter? Does this account help me to understand the Lucy poems any better than I did before? For myself, I can only say that a knowledge of the springs which released a poem is not necessarily a help towards understanding the poem: too much information about the origins of the poem may even break my contact with it. I feel no need for any light upon the Lucy poems beyond the radiance shed by the poems themselves.

I am not maintaining that there is no context in which such information or conjecture as that of Sir Herbert Read and Mr. Bateson may be relevant. It is relevant if we want to understand Wordsworth; but it is not directly relevant to our understanding of his poetry. Or rather, it is not relevant to our understanding of the poetry as poetry. I am even prepared to suggest that there is, in all great poetry, something which must remain unaccountable however complete might be our knowledge of the poet, and that is what matters most. When the poem has been made, something new was happened, something that cannot be wholly explained by anything that went before. That, I believe, is what we mean by 'creation'.

The explanation of poetry by examination of its sources is not the method of all contemporary criticism by any means; but it is a method which responds to the desire of a good many readers that poetry should be explained to them in terms of something else: the chief part of the letters I receive from persons unknown to me, concerning my own poems, consists of requests for a kind of explanation that I cannot possibly give. There are other tendencies such as that represented by Professor Richard's investigation of the problem of how the appreciation of poetry can be taught, or by the verbal subtleties of his distinguished pupil, Professor Empson. And I have recently noticed a development, which I suspect has its origin in the classroom methods of Professor Richards, which is, in its way, a healthy reaction against the diversion of attention from the poetry to the poet. It is found in a book published not long ago, entitled *Interpretations*: a series of

essays by twelve of the younger English critics, each analysing one poem of his own choice. The method is to take a well-known poem each of the poems analysed in this book is a good one of its kind-without reference to the author or to his other work, analyse it stanza by stanza and line by line, and extract, squeeze, tease, press every drop of meaning out of it that one can. It might be called the lemon-squeezer school of criticism. As the poems range from the sixteenth century to the present day, as they differ a good deal from one another-the book begins with 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' and ends with 'Prufrock' and Yeats's 'Among School Children', and as each critic has his own procedure, the result is interesting and a little confusing-and, it must be admitted, to study twelve poems each analysed so painstakingly is a very tiring way of passing the time. I imagine that some of the poets (they are all dead except myself) would be surprised at learning what their poems mean: I had one or two minor surprises myself, as on learning that the fog, mentioned early in 'Prufrock', had somehow got into the drawing-room. But the analysis of 'Prufrock' was not an attempt to find origins, either in literature or in the darker recesses of my private life; it was an attempt to find out what the poem really meant-whether that was I had meant it to mean or not. And for that I was grateful. There were several essays which struck me as good. But as every method has its own limitations and dangers, it is only reasonable to mention what seem to me the limitations and dangers of this one, dangers against which, if it were practised for what I suspect should be its chief use, that is, as an exercise for pupils, it would be the business of the teacher to warn his class.

The first danger is that assuming that there must be just one interpretation of the poem as a whole, that must be right. There will be details of explanation, especially with poems written in another age than our own, matters of fact, historical allusions, the meaning of a certain word at a certain date, which can be established, and the teacher can see that his pupils get these right. But as for the meaning of the poem as a whole, it is not exhausted by any explanation, for the meaning is what the poem means to different sensitive readers. The second danger-a danger into which I do not think any of the critics in the volume I have mentioned has fallen, but a danger to which the reader is exposed-is that of assuming that the interpretation of a poem, if valid, is necessarily an account of what the author consciously or unconsciously was trying to do. For the tendency is so general, to believe that we understand a poem when we have identified its origins and traced the process to which the poet submitted his materials, that we may easily believe the converse-that any explanation of the poem is also an account of how it was written. The analysis of 'Prufrock' to which I have referred interested me because it helped me to see the poem through the eyes of an intelligent, sensitive and diligent reader. That is not at all to say that he saw the poem through my eyes, or that his account has anything to do with the experiences that led up to my writing it, or with anything I experienced in the process of writing it. And my third comment is, that I should, as a test, like to see the method applied to some new poem, some very good poem, and one that was previously unknown to me: because I should like to find out whether, after pursuing the analysis, I should be able to enjoy the poem. For nearly all the poems in the

volume were poems that I had known and loved for many years; and after reading the analyses, I found I was slow to recover my previous feeling about the poems. It was as if someone had taken a machine to pieces and left me with the task of reassembling the parts. I suspect, in fact, that a good deal of the value of an interpretation is that it should be my own interpretation. There are many things, perhaps, to know about this poem, or that, many facts about which scholars can instruct me which will help me to avoid definite misunderstanding; but a valid interpretation, I believe, must be at the same time an interpretation of my own feelings when I read it.

It has been no part of my purpose to give a comprehensive view of all types of literary criticism practiced in our time. I wished first to call attention to the transformation of literary criticism which we may say began with Coleridge but which has proceeded with greater acceleration during the last twenty-five years. This acceleration I took to be prompted by the relevance of the social sciences to criticism, and by the teaching of literature (including contemporary literature) in colleges and universities. I do not deplore the transformation, for it seems to me to have been inevitable. In an age of uncertainty, an age in which men are bewildered by new sciences, an age in which so little can be taken for granted as common beliefs, assumptions and background of all readers, no explorable area can be forbidden ground. But, among all this variety, we may ask, what is there, if anything, that should be common to all literary criticism? Thirty years ago, I asserted that the essential function of literary criticism was 'the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste'. That phrase

may sound some what pompous to our ears in 1956. Perhaps I could put it more simply and more acceptably to the present age, by saying to 'promote the understanding and enjoyment of literature'. I would add that there is implied here also the negative task of pointing out what should not be enjoyed. For the critic may on occasion be called upon to condemn the second-rate and expose the fraudulent: though that duty is secondary to the duty of discriminating praise of what is praiseworthy. And I must stress the point that I do not think of enjoyment and understanding as distinct activities—one emotional and the other intellectual. By understanding I do not mean explanation though explanation of what can be explained may often be a necessary preliminary to understanding. To offer a very simple instance; to learn the unfamiliar words, and the unfamiliar forms of words, is a necessary preliminary to the understanding of Chaucer; it is explanation: but one could master the vocabulary, spelling, grammar and syntax of Chaucer—indeed, to carry the instance a stage further, one could be very well informed about the age of Chaucer, its social habits, its beliefs, its learning and its ignorance—and yet not understand the poetry. To understand a poem comes to the same thing as to enjoy it for the right reasons. One might say that it means getting from the poem such enjoyment as it is capable of giving: to enjoy a poem under a misunderstanding as to what it is, is to enjoy what is merely a projection of our own mind. So difficult a tool to handle, is language, that 'to enjoy' and 'to get enjoyment from' do not seem to mean quite the same thing: that to say that one 'gets enjoyment from poetry does not sound quite the same as to say that one 'enjoys poetry'. And indeed, the very meaning of 'joy' varies with the object inspiring joy; different poems, even,

yield different satisfactions. It is certain that we do not fully enjoy a poem unless we understand it; and on the other hand, it is equally true that we do not fully understand a poem unless we enjoy it. And that means, enjoying it to the right degree and in the right way, relative to other poems (it is in the relation of our enjoyment of a poem to our enjoyment of other poems that taste is shown). It should hardly be necessary to add that this implies that one shouldn't enjoy bad poems-unless their badness is of a sort that appeals to our sense of humour.

I have said that explanation may be a necessary preliminary to understanding. It seems to me, however, that I understand some poetry without explanation, for instance Shakespeare's

Full fathom five thy father lies

Or Shelley's

Art thou pale for weariness

Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth

For here, and in a great deal of poetry, I see nothing to be explained-nothing, that is, that would help me to understand it better and therefore enjoy it more. And sometimes explanation, as I have already hinted, can distract us altogether from the poem as poetry, instead of leading us in the direction of understanding. My best reason, perhaps, for believing that I am not deluded in thinking that I understand such poetry as the lyrics by Shakespeare and Shelley which I have just cited, is that these two poems give me as keen a thrill when I repeat them to-day as they did fifty years ago.

The difference, then, between the literary critic, and the critic who has passed beyond the frontier of literary criticism, is not that the literary critic is 'purely' literary, or that he has no other interest. A critic who was interested in nothing but 'literature' would have very little or say to us, for his literature would be a pure abstraction. Poets have other interests beside poetry-otherwise their poetry would be very empty: they are poets because their dominant interest has been in turning their experience and their thought (and to experience and to think means to have interest beyond poetry)-in turning their experience and their thinking into poetry. The critic accordingly is a literary critic of his primary interest, in writing criticism, is to help his readers to understand and enjoy. But he must have other interests, just as much as the poet himself; for the literary critic is not merely a technical expert, who has learned the rules to be observed by the writers he criticizes: the critic must be the whole man, a man with convictions and principles, and of knowledge and experience of life.

We can therefore ask, about any writing which is offered to us as literary criticism, is it aimed towards understanding and enjoyment? If it is not, it may still be a legitimate and useful activity; but it is to be judged as a contribution to psychology, or sociology, or logic, or pedagogy, or some other pursuit-and is to be judged by specialists, not by men of letters. We must not identify biography with criticism: biography is ordinarily useful in providing explanation; but it may also, in directing our attention on the poet, lead us away from the poetry. We must not confuse knowledgeable information-about a poet's period, the conditions of the

society in which he lived, the ideas current in his time implicit in his writings, the state of the language in his period-with understanding his poetry. Such knowledge, as I have said, may be a necessary preparation for understanding the poetry; furthermore, it has a value of its own, as history; but for the appreciation of the poetry, it can only lead us to the door: we must find our own way in. For the purpose of acquiring such knowledge, from the point of view taken throughout this paper, is not primarily that we should be able to project ourselves into a remote period, that we should be able to think and feel, when reading the poetry, as a contemporary of the poet might have thought and felt, though such experience has its own value; it is rather to divest ourselves of the limitations of our own age, and the poet, whose work we are reading, of the limitations of his age, in order to get the direct experience, the immediate contact with his poetry. What matters most, let us say, in reading an ode of Sappho, is not that I should imagine myself to be an island Greek of twenty-five hundred years ago; what matters is the experience which is the same for all human beings of different centuries and languages capable of enjoying poetry, the spark which can leap across those 2500 years. So the critic to whom I am most grateful is the one who can make me look at something. I have never looked at before, or looked at only with eyes clouded by prejudice, set me face to face with it and then leave me alone with it. From that point, I must rely upon my own sensibility, intelligence, and capacity for wisdom.

If in literary criticism, we place all the emphasis upon understanding, we are in danger of slipping from understanding

to mere explanation. We are in danger even of pursuing criticism as if it was science, which it never can be. If, on the other hand, we over-emphasize enjoyment, we will tend to fall into the subjective and impressionistic, and our enjoyment will profit us no more than mere amusement and pastime. Thirty-three years ago, it seems to have been the latter type of criticism, the impressionistic, that had caused the annoyance I felt when I wrote on 'the function of criticism'. To-day it seems to me that we need to be more on guard against the purely explanatory. But I do not want to leave you with the impression that I wish to condemn the criticism of our time. These last thirty years have been, I think, a brilliant period in literary criticism in both Britain and America. It may even come to seem, in retrospect, too brilliant. Who knows?



A note on T.S. Eliot as a Critic

It is no exaggeration to say that T. S. Eliot is a great personality in both criticism and creation in modern age. He heralded a new era in the realm of traditional poetry and criticism. In theme, he wanted not a nostalgia for the golden past and rosy future but depicted the drab reality of modern taste and temperament. In technique, he rejected the verbal melody or mere mellifluity (pleasant & smooth) and put in their place hard and solid images and symbols.

Eliot was a great classicist. He stood for objectivity ('escape from personality'), tradition and unified sensibility. He wanted art not to be direct statement but to have an 'Objective Correlative' or 'an emotional equivalent.' To him, symbolic expression is the expression. He was richly influenced by the Jacobean and the Metaphysicals, by the French symbolists, by Hulme and Pound. He made an abundant use of irony and paradox, ambiguity and complexities, ellipsis, and, and allusions, connotations and Metaphysical conceits. He introduced free verse in poetry.

It has been a specialty of English literature that it has produced great critics who were great creative writers. Sir Philip

Sidney, Ben Johnson, Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, to name a few were the poets as well as the critics of a high order. Eliot also believed that the creative writer can be a good critic. In fact, his poems enact his beliefs and theories.

The core of Eliot's aesthetic metaphysics which is the foundation of his literary criticism is the principle of unity versus multiplicity rather than pleasure versus pain or even piety versus sin. And no critic, since the 17th century, could be said to have made this principle the corner-stone of the body of his critical principle and practice. Sidney, perhaps, came closest to it, but was led astray by his enthusiasm for the newly revived Aristotelian classicism. It is his purism, for example, that blinds him to the aesthetic unity of Shakespeare's plays in which contradictions come resolved in the unity of the artist's experience. After Sidney, the process of 'dissociation of sensibility,' to use Eliot's phrase, set in, as a result of which Dryden emphasized the application of reason to the exclusion of emotion, while, later on, Wordsworth advocated for the apotheosis of emotion to the exclusion of reason. What is common, however, to both the centuries is the operative critical principles of pain and pleasure, the merit of a poem is said to be depending upon its capacity to give pleasure. And the question of pleasure and pain inevitably leads to moral issues and away from the intrinsic merit of a poem as a work of art. Eliot directed his attention to the creative process which is essentially a process of assimilation and transmutation of feelings and thoughts and ideas into a unity, brought about a complete reorientation in

English criticism. Both as a poet and as a critic, Eliot derived influences from diverse sources, both past and present, but his originality lies in the completeness of his assimilation of the influences from such diverse sources as Arnold, Pound, and Hulme, and Baudelaire and Verlaine.

When Eliot shone on the critical firmament of English Literature there were two main schools of literary criticism – (1) Impressionistic School and (2) Abstract or Intellectual School. The Impressionistic Critics evaluated a literary work on the basis of their personal impressions and intuitions and responses. To them criticism was an expression of impressions and responses. They had a high aesthetic sensibility and were hunters after beauty. They regarded all kinds of pedantry (too much attention to small details or rules), scholarship, principles and laws of literary criticism as unnecessary.

Eliot in his work – “The Sacred Wood” attacked both these schools. In his essays ‘The Perfect Critic’ and ‘The Imperfect Critic’, he took the impressionistic and the intellectual critics to task.

Impressionistic criticism of scholars such as Arthur Symonds can not be acceptable because words can not express adequately the impressions received by the mind. In such a criticism the critic adds a number of things from his mind and does not express the pure impressions of his mind. Hence this kind of personal or Subjective criticism can not be true criticism. Impressionistic criticism is the expression of the critics own emotions, and hence can not be perfect criticism.

Eliot views on criticism derive from his views on art and tradition in his essay ‘The Function of Criticism’. He defined criticism as “The commendation and exposition of works of art by means of written words”. Criticism can never be an autotelic activity because criticism is always about something. Criticism always has one and only definite end, and that end is elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste. Eliot also proceeds to consider the qualifications of a critic. The foremost quality which an ideal critic must have is a highly developed sense of fact. The sense of fact is a rare gift. It is not frequently met with and it is very slow to develop.

Thus, we see that T. S. Eliot occupies a very high position in both criticism and creation in modern age. His three essays – “Tradition and the Individual Talent, The function of criticism, and The Frontiers of Criticism, mark the advent of new era in the history of modern criticism. He goes to the extent of saying as “criticism is as inevitable as breathing”. His three essays truly justify his views on criticism. He can definitely be regarded as one of the greatest pioneers in the history of English literature and criticism.



A note on Tradition and the Individual Talent

“Tradition and the Individual Talent” is a thought provoking essay by T.S. Eliot. According to Eliot, the relationship between the past and the present is one of confrontation, the past should not fight with the present. It should provide inspiration to us. Eliot clearly says that this relationship provide a comparison and judgment. This does not mean that one should abandon one's individuality and merely imitate the past. If that happens, the artistic activity becomes impossible, for it should be clearly understood that art is certain and not imitation. What a poet should do is to provide us with a set of values against which a new work of art can be tested.

Eliot next proceeds to examine the different ways in which we usually react to the past. We can accept the past as a lump which we swallow completely. There are people who accept anything of the past without any critical judgment. His discriminating acceptance of that of our ancestors have said is very harmful. A son may be influenced by his father but he should be himself one or two artist from the past and he influenced by them. Eliot observes that this sort of reference usually happens when one is young and one may fall in love with a particular poet

and the consequence is other poet are neglected. For example, Eliot himself admires Dryden and Pope so much that he could not be fair to the poets of Romantic period. It is significant that Eliot's comment on the Romantic Poets are not satisfactory.

Having examined the action of the past on the present, Eliot tries to determine the influence on poetry. He says that there is general falling that too much learning is bad for a poet. The argument being that of a poet is too pre-occupied with his predecessors, he ceases to be himself. He tries to imitate those poets whom he admires this is bad because we should never allow any such thing to spoil one's individuality. If we do that then we should no longer be a creative artist, we shall be more imitators. The conclusion where Eliot arrives at is that: “A poet can have the consciousness of past and that he should contain this consciousness throughout his career.”

Eliot in this essay has purposely talked about the theory of impersonality. It is with the intension to show the role of individual talent, that he has put so much of emphasis on an individual necessity of having a sound awareness of the past. According to Eliot's theory of impersonality, poetry is not merely an expression of personality. It is in fact, a process of depersonalization. The progress of an artist is therefore, a continual self-surrender and continual extinction of personality. As such, the romantic theory of subjectivity is replaced by the concept of impersonality of art. In the words of Eliot: “Poetry is not the turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality.” By such

observation, Eliot has not denied personality of the poet, rather he affirms that poetic creation is an act of sacrificing personal emotion to the emotion of art.

In Eliot's opinion all new poets are related to the poetry that has never been written. This is rather strong language but it is helpful for understanding regarding the relationship of the poem on the poets. It means poets and authors are not necessary most interesting than other human beings, very often a great poet has a dull life. For example, Shakespeare and Wordsworth lead the life of ordinary human beings. They never had any colorful adventures. How did they write great poetry then? Eliot explains, a real poet's personality is a medium through which things come. It is said by the scientists that the radio-waves are created by electromagnetism. There are some medium through which messages are transmuted from London to New York the medium is not the message like a rose, a poet's personality is a medium through which we meet thoughts and ideas. Therefore, a poet may be regarded, more as a receiver than as a creator.

Thus, we find that "Tradition and Individual Talent" is a classic of literary criticism. It is packed with trenchant (penetrating remarks on the relation of present to past as well as on the nature of poetry itself.) Eliot's theory of tradition is not more than a literary concept. It is relevant purely as a literary doctrine which endeavours to examine the whole scheme of relation binding the poet and his poetry or more generally the relation between the past and the present.



Eliot's Concept of Tradition Or

Eliot's concept on Historical sense

The concept tradition or 'historical sense' is a theory from Tradition and the Individual Talent by T.S. It is central to his impersonal theory of both criticism and creation. But the concept is highly paradoxical, complex and comprehensive. In common parlance the word 'tradition' generally suggests something old and conventional, and is used as a term of censure. Eliot says that if tradition is to mean following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successor, tradition should positively be discouraged and that novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited. If we want it, we must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in first place, the 'historical sense'. The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but also its presence. The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of Literature of his own country has a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the

timeless and temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most actually conscious of his place in time of his own contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, is his appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. We can not value him alone. We must set him for contrast and comparison among the dead. This is a principle not only of historical criticism but also of aesthetic criticism. What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an idea order among themselves which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) word of art among them. The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.

The advantage then are the following :

- (i) The artist is enriched by the treasure of the past as he also enriches it with his own contribution.
- (ii) When the artist writes with the historical sense, his art becomes meaningful to the entire community and not to his sale-self.

Eliot thinks that the artist who wants to break away with the entire tradition is not only irrelevant but rather positively destructive to the treasure of the ages. He keeps Lawrence in this category.

For the illustration of Eliot's concept let us take three different examples to prove how the three taken together compose a simultaneous order.

Sophocles showed that man suffers because he has been preordained to do so (Oedipus Tyrannous). Shakespeare shows that man suffers because of his own errors (Macbeth, Othello). The modern Marxist tragedies show that man suffers on account of the socio-economic forces (The Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller). Now, there are the different possible ways of looking at the same problem. The question is not who is right and who is wrong. All the there are looking at the things from their point of view. A study of one of the three invites comparison with the other two. That is how art and appreciation both go together.

Another example, whether Eliot compared the calm evening to that of 'a patient etherized upon the table', he wanted to present an ironic contrast to Wordsworth's comparison of it to that of a "nun breathless with the spirit of adoration." The change in the image shows the change of the attitude to nature in between the two periods. Now, Wordsworth is to be seen in the light of Eliot and Eliot in the light of Wordsworth. This kind of reading gives meaning as well as delight. Examples can be multiplied.

Hence, we see that Eliot's concept of tradition is quite comprehensive. It can go a long way in checking the eccentric tendencies of the writers. No wonder, Eliot's concepts have become the gospel of our age.



Impersonality in art by T. S. Eliot Or Eliot's Objective / Impersonal Theory

Impersonality in art lies in the essay Tradition and Individual Talent by T.S. Eliot. Eliot elaborates his impersonal theory of poetry by bringing into focus two important points: (1) As all poetry, whether written in the past or being written in the present, is a living whole, no poem is to be, or can viewed in isolation as an unrelated identity. Each poem is modified by the poems ever written, and in turn modifies them all. The relation in which a poem stands to other poems by other poets is, therefore, the proper object upon criticism and appreciation is to be directed. (2) Another field to be explored by the critical activity is the relation of a poem to the poet himself. This concept is very closely related to his concept of tradition and historical sense. The objective theory of art says that an artist should be objective or impersonal while composing a piece of work of art. The theory also shows some of the salient features of Eliot's critical style e.g: his critical insight into the intricacies of art; his thought provoking observation and, above all, his simple, lucid and easy language.

T.S. Eliot's opinion is that there is a great difference between the man and the poet. Both are different in their attitude in looking into the matter. So, the feeling or emotion or vision of the one should be different from the feeling or emotion or the vision of the other. Then only a critic or a poet can arrive at a right conclusion. Eliot says that honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. The same opinion is echoed in his famous definition of poetry: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of ^{Subjective} personality, but an escape from personality." Thus, by this definition, Eliot means to say that a poet or a critic must be aloof from the personal whims and private peculiarities and ^{he} should learn to devote to the common pursuit of true judgment.

Eliot is of the opinion that the past is never dead rather it lives in the present. He observes what happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual ^{Progress} extinction of his personality. In other words, a poet is great not because he puts his personality into his work, not because he is more interesting or has more to say, but because he has a mind in which special or very varied feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations. So, there is a separation between the man who suffers and the mind which creates, and the greater the separation, the greater the artist. Why? Because the function of the man is to gather experience and then to hand it over to the artist and the function of the artist is to give it an adequate form.

If the man encroaches upon the jurisdiction of the artist, there is a risk of art being a mere expression of his idea or ego or the narrow self.

Eliot's theory of "Emotional Equivalent" or "Objective Correlative" also deal with impersonality in form and structure. In the above theories, the artist has to surrender his personality to the form, which will speak what he intends.

It is very interesting to note that what Eliot holds, can never be fully applicable in his own life. He failed to appreciate Lawrence, a great novelist and poet of modern time. Not to speak of only Eliot there are others also who are not fully away from the personal prejudices and indeosyncracies. As great a poet as Goethe ^{etc} recognized only two great poets – Shakespeare and Byron. Byron disliked a number of great poets including Wordsworth. Even Arnold failed to appreciate Pope and Dryden. So personal prejudices mar our literary judgment.

So we see that, Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry' is a thought provoking conception a conception which heralded a new era in the realm of traditional thinking.



A critical note on "The Function of Criticism"

The essay The Function of Criticism 1923, is a reply of a controversy as Middleton Murry challenged the opinions of Eliot in his essay Romanticism and the Tradition. It is a thought provoking essay by T. S. Eliot in which he defines the primary objective of critical endeavour as the 'commentation and exposition of works of art by means of written words. It says that the critic must be the whole man, a man with convictions and principles and of knowledge and experience of life. In writing criticism, the Primary interest of a true critic is to help his readers 'to understand and enjoy' the poetry of a particular poet. The essay, as we shall see also shows some of the salient features of Eliot as a critic and stylist e.g: his plain and suggestive metaphor, his ironic tone, his epigrammatic density of statement which often packs a wealth of meaning in a few words etc.

In this essay T. S. Eliot enumerates the function of criticism and defines it in his own way. He says "criticism must always profess an end in view, which roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of the taste." He further says : The critic's task, therefore appears to be quite clearly

cut out for him, and is ought to be comparatively easy to decide whether he performs it satisfactorily. And in general, what kind of criticism are useful and what are not. But on giving the matter a little attention, we perceive that criticism, far from being simple and orderly field of beneficent activity, is no better than a Sunday park of contending and contentions. The critic one would suppose, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks-fares to which we are all subject and compose his difference with as many of his fellows as possible in the common pursuit of the true judgment.

Immediately after such an eviction, or as soon as relief has abated our rage, we are compelled to admit that these remain certain books, certain essay, certain sentence, certain men, who have been useful to us. We must ourselves decide what is useful and what is not, and it is quite likely that we are not competent to decide. But it is fairly certain that interpretation is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all. But merely putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed.

Comparison and analysis are the chief tools of the critic. It is obvious indeed that they are tools, to be handled with care, and not employed in an inquiry into the number of times giraffes are mentioned in the English novel. They are not used with conspicuous success by many contemporary writers. You must know what majority of critics can be expected only to parrot the opinions of the last master of criticism among more independent minds a period of destruction of preposterous over estimation. Each new master of criticism performs kind from the last. And

longer the sequence of critics, we have the greater amount of correction is possible.

So, we see that Eliot is a classicist in criticism and he advises us to reject the inner voice. "The true critic should accept common principles which have already been accepted. He must have a highly developed sense of fact, because opinions and fancy may corrupt taste but the fact never does so" Sean Lucy after going through what Eliot has said has summarized the functions of criticism as: Try to discover the nature of poetry- a branch of aesthetics, to tell the good from the bad, to preserve the living traditions of literature to correct taste and to elucidate works of art.



A note on The Frontiers of Criticism

boundary / limit

"The Frontiers of Criticism" is a lecture delivered by T.S. Eliot at the University of Minnesota in 1956, and published by the University. It says that the critic must be the ^{of a well-learned} whole man, a man with convictions and principles and of knowledge and experience of life. In writing criticism, the primary interest of a true critic is to help his readers to understand and enjoy the poetry of a particular poet. The essay, as we shall see, also shows some of the salient feature of Eliot as a critic and stylist e.g: his plain and suggestive metaphor, his ironic tone, his epigrammatic density of statement which often packs a wealth of meaning in a few words etc.

The title of the essay is highly suggestive. It says that a critic must have respect for the frontiers of criticism, that is, there are limits, exceeding which literary criticism ceases to be literary.

Many years back, Eliot said that every generation must provide its own literary criticism. It is only because each generation looks at masterpieces of the past in a different perspective. Eliot illustrates his view by taking the examples of Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" and Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria". He says: "It

is not merely that Johnson represents a literary tradition to the end of which he himself belongs, while Coleridge is defending the merits and criticizing the weaknesses of a new style. The difference is more pertinent to what I have been saying, is due to the scope and variety to the interests which Coleridge brought to bear on his discussion of poetry." Thus, according to Eliot, the criticism of today may be said to be in direct descent from Coleridge. Why? Because, if he would be alive now, he would take the same interest in the social sciences and in the study of language and semantics, that he took in the sciences available to him.

Eliot discusses a type of criticism which he calls as the criticism of explanation by origins in which criticism merges into scholarship and scholarship merges into criticism. In this type of criticism, the critic traces the origin and sources of a poem in the unconscious and sub-conscious recesses of the poet's mind. Thus, it is beyond the frontiers of literary criticism. Livingston's Lowes study of Coleridge is a fine example of this criticism. Eliot is of the opinion that biographical material does not help us to understand poetry as poetry. He gives the illustration of Wordsworth. It is generally agreed that the best part of Wordsworth's poetry was written in a brief span of years. Herbert Read attributed it to his love affair with Annette Vallon and F.W. Bateson to Wordsworth's falling in love with his sister Dorothy. This explains why, after Wordsworth's marriage, his inspiration dried up. It may be true. But the point is whether a knowledge of his fact helps us to understand the Lucy poem any better than we did before. Eliot observes that too much information about the origin of the poem may even break any contact with it. He feels

that there is no need for any light upon the Lucy poems beyond the radiance shed by the poems themselves.

The other method of criticism, are I.A. Richard's school of psychological interpretation and William Empson's school of verbal analysis. Eliot calls them "Lemon squeezer schools of criticism." Such critics on many occasions, find out meaning in the poem which is quite different from that which the poet wanted it to mean.

Years ago, Eliot asserted that the essential function of literary criticism was the elucidation of work of art and the correction of taste. But in 1956, he added two new functions—understanding and enjoyment. It is certain that we don't fully enjoy a poem unless we understand it; and it is equally true that we don't fully understand a poem unless we enjoy it. So, if a critic pays a great attention to the ^{personal} sources of a poem it may obstruct the proper understanding and enjoyment of poetry. But if a critic fails to help us in understanding and enjoying poetry, his work may still be useful. It might be a contribution to psychology, sociology, logic, pedagogy, etc.

So, we see that "The Frontiers of Criticism" scoffs at those critics who are very serious about their job. But the scoffing is not harsh and rugged, but mild and jovial. It can not be denied that Eliot has offered us perhaps one of the most comprehensive and perceptive statements on creative and critical activity in the history of English literary criticism.



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